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A Perspective from the Dean-Elect

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A Perspective from the Dean-Elect

The preface to any good book is usually written last and read first. The preface to a tour as a dean would benefit, no doubt, from the same kind of hindsight, but the inexorable movement of time does not permit such a convenience. Beginnings must come first. And so where do we begin?

The predominant feature of the immediate future of this college is the construction of a new building to house its activities. The programs of the College of Law have suffered increasingly in recent years from the inadequacies of the old building. Classrooms are too few, too noisy and too hot during much of the academic year. Much of the enthusiasm so essential to a successful educational enterprise has been sapped by these purely mechanical limitations. The library passed a point of critical mass more than a decade ago and its operations have since been increasingly compromised. Moreover, the design of the old building provided no space for spontaneous meeting between faculty and students and thus discouraged the emergence of a true community of scholars. Much of the benefit of the congenial relationships within the school has thus been lost. Many of these constraints will soon pass away, for the new building is under construction and it will provide vastly improved physical facilities for the College of Law.

There is a risk, of course, that once the new building is complete, there will be a consequent sense of "well that takes care of that." Should this attitude come to pass, the programs of the college might rattle around in a dazzling new building suffering from that form of academic malnutrition known as brick and mortar disease. Lack of adequate facilities can clearly hamper a program. The presence of them does not guarantee success.

The central challenge of the immediate future then will be to insure that the new building becomes a symbol of a continuing commitment to quality legal education. New facilities will certainly intensify old challenges and pose the opportunity for a significant change in the scale of the operation. The college must build upon its special relationship with the Bar of West Virginia to utilize the practical wisdom that is at hand without compromising the delicate balance between training and education. It must employ its relationship with the State of West Virginia in such a way as to sharpen its focus without narrowing its vision. It must continue to draw intel-

lectual strength from its setting in the midst of a land-grant university and respond to the traditional challenges of teaching, research and service that are the call of such institutions.

An old constraint is fading, and opportunities for addressing the continuing challenges of the institution on a new and bolder scale are at hand.

Willard D. Lorensen